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# Building the Foundations of the Backhouse Nursery of York

Gillian M. Parker

**Summary:** This paper aims to fill the gap in knowledge about the Backhouse nursery, in the absence of any substantial archival record, by tracing its early development, showing how it built on the foundations of two earlier, regionally significant nurseries in York - Telfords and Riggs – and by exploring something of the plants it grew. The story begins with the land inside York's walls, moves to Fishergate and is taken up to 1854, the point at which Backhouses consolidated all their activity on a site just outside York, in Holgate.

## Introduction

The Backhouse nursery of York was established in 1816 and by the end of the nineteenth century was one of the most famous plant nurseries in Britain, with an international reputation. It grew, hybridized and supplied trees and plants, won prizes at national horticultural shows, utilised plant-hunters in Europe and the Americas, and developed a nursery that eventually stretched to some hundred acres in Holgate, near York. This site included a massive rock garden that astounded those who visited it. The nursery also laid out gardens across England, Scotland and Wales, trained young gardeners who developed significant careers of their own, and employed gardeners who were acknowledged national experts in their respective fields. By the early 1920s, however, the nursery was in financial difficulties and parts were auctioned off. It was purchased by James Hamilton in 1922, thus ending the Backhouse family's association with it, though their name persisted in the successor nursery until its eventual closure in 1955.

Despite its national and international importance, no history of the nursery as a business has been published, perhaps due to the absence of an archive. This is in contrast to some other significant nurseries where archival holdings have allowed histories to be told.<sup>1</sup> Digitisation of newspapers and horticultural publications now opens up new space in which to explore nurseries' contribution to the expansion of gardening to the 'middling sorts' in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

## The Telfords and the Monastic Origins of the Nursery

It is well known that in 1816, brothers Thomas (1792-1845) and James (1794-1869) Backhouse took over the going concern of the Telfords Nursery in York, as signalled by an advertisement of 18 May 1816 (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

The image shows two newspaper advertisements from the York Herald, dated 18 May 1816. The top advertisement is titled "Nursery and Seed Business." and is from John and George Telford. It thanks the nobility and public for their support and announces that the nursery business, including stock, grounds, and seed warehouses, is being transferred to Messrs. Thomas and James Backhouse of Darlington. It also requests that all debts due to the Telfords be paid to the Backhouses. The bottom advertisement is also titled "Nursery and Seed Business." and is from Thomas and James Backhouse. It respectfully informs the nobility and gentry that they have taken over the nursery and seed business from John and George Telford, and expresses their hope for continued support and patronage.

Figure 1: Announcement of Transfer of Ownership of the Nursery from Telfords to Backhouses. York Herald, 18 May 1816 (British Library Newspapers)

Just what the ‘grounds’ were that the Backhouses had ‘entered upon’ in 1816 remains opaque. Harvey published a short history of the Telford nursery in 1969, but argued that despite his detailed work several Telford sites probably remained unidentified. Backhouses certainly took on the Telfords’ site in Tanner Row within York’s walls, known as Friars’ Gardens. This colloquial name signalled the site’s pre-Dissolution history: in 1736 Francis Drake referred to Lady Hewley’s ‘hospital’ and ‘Fryars-gardens’ as lying on land ‘in which did anciently stand the monastery of the *Fryars preachers of York*’ (original italics). This Dominican priory was of royal foundation, from a series of charters granted, between 1228 and 1464.<sup>4</sup>

The Dominican order of mendicant preachers (‘Blackfriars’) originated in the early thirteenth century in Toulouse, France, but established itself rapidly in England with Henry III’s patronage. The York house was only the fourth established in England, the first to be founded by Henry III, and was the head of the ‘Visitation of York’ in the north for houses founded subsequently. Henry gifted the existing Royal chapel of St Mary Magdalen to the Order; the plot behind it, in part of York described as ‘almost deserted’, was given by the Lord Mayor after a royal enquiry about a suitable site.<sup>5</sup> Small additional areas of land were granted subsequently.<sup>6</sup>

Royal patronage and ‘alms’ seem to have ended with Richard II and priory income then came mostly from testamentary bequests.<sup>7</sup> Although the Historic Environment Record claims that ‘[n]othing is known of the conventual buildings’ beyond there being two gatehouses, the bequests and accounts of donations confirm the site had a bell-tower, an infirmary and a draw well and that the significant Percy family endowed a chapel within its church.<sup>8</sup> Dissolution records identified a cloister, brewery, buttery, granary, and ‘chambers’, in addition to the church. The site within the city walls was relatively small, however - an acre by most estimates.<sup>9</sup>

No monastery had a happy Dissolution, but that of the Blackfriars at York was probably made worse by the involvement in 1536 of their Prior, John Pickering, in the Pilgrimage of Grace. On 27 November 1538, a year after Pickering’s execution at Tyburn, the priory was ‘given up to the king’, via three of the four northern Royal Commissioners for the suppression of monasteries - Sir George Lawson, Richard Bellasis, William Blitheman and James Rokeby. Everything was sold off,

including the lead from the roofs, the bells and all the plate, with the ‘silver hand’, probably a reliquary of St Mary Magdalene.<sup>10</sup>

William Blitheman subsequently rented the house and land of the priory and then in 1540 bought from the Crown:

*‘The Blak Freres callyd the Tofts w<sup>h</sup>in the Citie of York ... the Scite of the late howse ther, with Garthins and Ortyerd adionyng the same, late in the hands of the Freres ther, conteynyng by estimac<sup>o</sup> one acre, and is worth by the yere to be let to Ferme, xx<sup>s</sup>’<sup>11</sup>* (the modern equivalent of £17,900 in annual rent).

Blitheman also bought Monk Bretton priory, near Barnsley, and a part of Fountains Abbey, paying £892.3s 4d (the equivalent of £16 million in 2021) in total for the three sites.<sup>12</sup>

Blitheman was an influential and powerful member of the new church and financial bureaucracies and a trusted enforcer for Thomas Cromwell. He played a significant role in monitoring and damping down the Pilgrimage of Grace, and dissolved Bridlington Priory (another Dominican house) and Jervaulx Abbey ‘immediately’ after surveying them in 1538 ‘in part as



Figure 2: Sarah Woolryce (Lady Sarah Hewley) 1627-1710 (Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

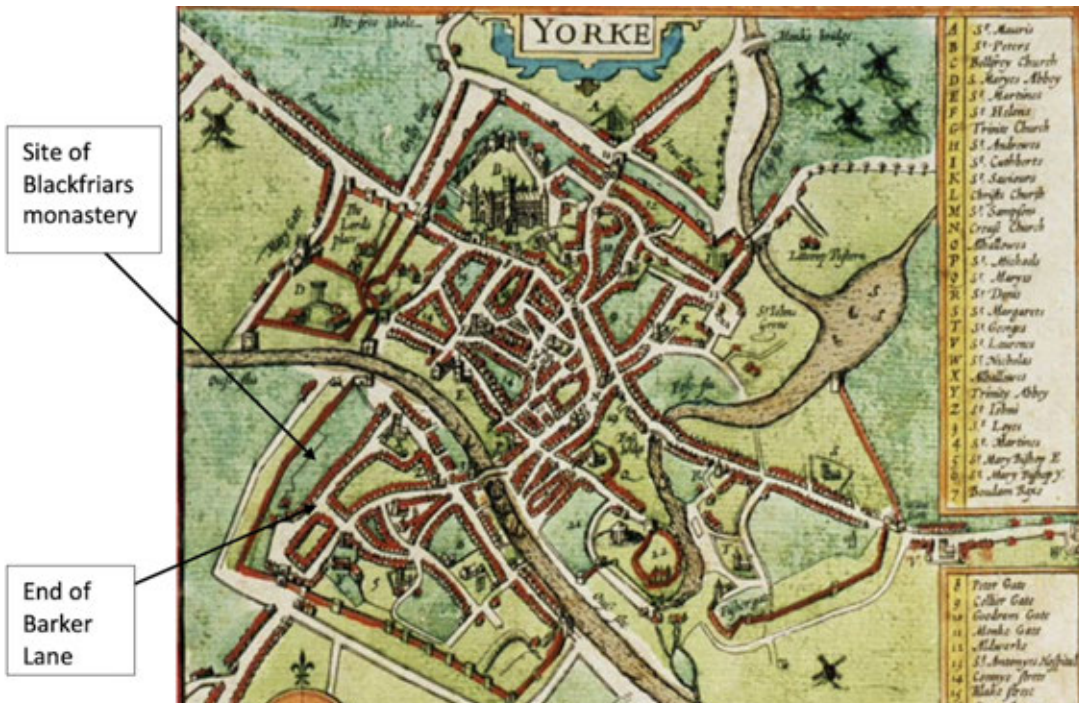


Figure 3: John Speed's 1611 Plan of York  
(courtesy of Occidental College Library, California. Detail created by author)

punishment for the widespread support shown in the recent uprisings in their neighbourhoods'.<sup>13</sup> It seems unlikely that he ever lived on the York site. Rather, as Wilcott and Bryson argue about Monk Bretton, the high-rent land must have seemed 'an enticing investment', in an important city where space was always at a premium, hemmed in as it was by walls.<sup>14</sup>

The land passed through various hands after Jasper Blitheman, William's grandson, granted it to Lawrence Green of York, eventually being sold in 1699 for £520 (£1.48 million) to Lady Sarah Hewley, in whose hands, through her subsequent charitable trust, it remained until 1839. The deeds of the sale to Lady Hewley mention the 'garden with the fruit trees therein' was 'in the tenure or occupation of George Telford, gardiner'. Land adjoining 'the said garden with stable and dove-cote' was also in the 'possession' of George Telford.<sup>15</sup>

Lady Hewley (1627-1710) was a wealthy local dissenter who soon after buying the land financed the building of a 'hospital' or almshouses on Tanner Row for the widows of dissenting ministers (Figure 2). She established a Trust, funded from income from her estates, that still exists as a charity.<sup>16</sup> In 1839, the land, which included the nursery grounds, was compulsorily

purchased for George Hudson's York and North Midland Railway. The Trust built new almshouses in St Saviourgate York, close to the Unitarian chapel that Lady Hewley and her husband had helped to fund.

All the above tells us who owned the land taken by the Crown in 1538, but nothing about what it was being used for. The earliest York map, John Speed's of 1611, shows the priory site unnamed and apparently empty, with a row of housing or tofts along its edge. Speed's plan contains no detail of occupation or use, so it is difficult to be sure what the darker green colouration on the map means, if anything.<sup>17</sup> However, the map does show a building and dividing wall on the site (Figure 3).

The memory of the Blackfriars' occupation of the site continued, as Benedict Horsley's 'Ichnography' of 1694 shows (Figure 4). Horsley was a 'painter and stainer', a York Freeman and the son of Edward Horsley, also a painter and stainer. As a member of an artistic family that had lived in the city at least from the early years of the seventeenth century, Benedict would have had an accurate idea of York's topography.<sup>18</sup> The grey areas on his plan represent buildings, so by this stage most of the tofts had disappeared, and there was a clear boundary to 'the Friars gardens'.

Francis Drake's plan of 1736 seems much influenced by Horsley's work of 42 years earlier (Figure 5). The beds and planting shown here signify nursery activity, and indeed Drake stated that the site of the monastery was

*'now a spacious garden; at present occupied by Mr Tilford, a worthy citizen, and whose knowledge in the mystery of gardening renders him of credit to his profession; being one of the first that brought our northern gentry into the method of planting and raising all kinds of forest trees, for use and ornament'.<sup>19</sup>*

This 'Mr Tilford' is the first John Telford (1689-1771), son of George Telford (1657-1704). However, Drake's map does not include anything resembling the

almshouse Lady Hewley had built in 1699/1700. Drake adds that Tanner Row was named because of 'the people of that trade residing much in it, their tan-pits being on the back of it'. These pits are probably the small rectangular features shown at the back of the tofts to the east of the priory site, on both his and Horsley's plans.

George Telford (1657-1704) became a Freeman of York in 1685, by redemption (ie he paid the Corporation to become a Freeman and to trade in York) but his trade is not named.<sup>20</sup> Two years earlier he had joined a long-established family of York bakers, by marrying Ellinor Barehead (1655-1714). George i and Ellinor had four sons; Robert (1684-1714), who became an attorney in Leeds, George ii (1687-1711), John



Figure 4: Benedict Horsley, 'The Ichnography or Ground Plot of Ye City of Yorke', pub. Peirce Tempest, 1697 (City of York Council/Explore Libraries and Archives Mutual, York. Detail created by author)



Figure 5: Francis Drake's 1736 Plan of York. (York Explore. Creative Commons. Detail created by author)

(1689-1771) and Charles (1695 ?) who was a cloth worker. George ii was admitted Freeman in 1703 by patrimony, as son of George Telford ‘gardiner’, but his early death meant that it was John who carried on the Telford business.<sup>21</sup>

A new lease signed in 1719 makes clear that the Friars’ Gardens were walled, well established with fruit and other trees, and ran up to the city walls.<sup>22</sup> It also shows that John was living in a house on the site and that, as when sold in 1699, there were also a barn, stables and a dovecote. When Roque published Chassereau’s plan of the city in 1750, Lady Hewley’s Hospital appeared at the front of the site, surrounded by nursery beds and planting (Figure 6). The rectangular pond was now surrounded by trees, which may suggest an attempt to disguise the tanning activity or that it had stopped, as the small pits evident in the earlier plans have disappeared.

Knowledge about the Telfords’ operations starts to emerge about 30 years after the nursery was established. Harvey records that John Aislabie at Studley Royal transferred his allegiance from the Perfects’ nursery at Pontefract to Telfords, on the basis of price, around 1729.<sup>23</sup> Telfords provided trees to Swillington House in the West Riding in the 1730s,<sup>24</sup> and trees and seeds on an annual basis to Scampston Hall, near Malton, between 1758 and 1774.<sup>25</sup> They also provided large quantities of seed to William Marwood at Busby

in the 1760s: Figure 7 shows the purchase of four or five different varieties of peas and beans and exotic looking broccoli but also tender fruit trees and a large pair of garden ‘shears’.<sup>26</sup>

In 1778 John Grimston of Kilwick Hall, near Driffield, sent a copy of a French catalogue of fruit trees to the Telfords, apparently wondering which might be available from them. The reply shows both that the Telfords were not fazed by deciphering the French and that they held many of the listed fruits, albeit sometimes under different names. They advised that many would need to be grown against a hot wall to ensure success in the East Yorkshire climate. A few years later, in 1782 they provided unspecified plants to William Pontey, the gardener at Kilwick Hall.<sup>27</sup>

Other families and houses that Telfords are known to have supplied with trees, plants and gardening equipment include the Darleys of Aldby, Cholmeleys of Brandsby and Howsham Hall in the 1760s.<sup>28</sup> Some of these sites are shown on Figure 8, although from a later map which shows clearly that the tree planters had been at work. There are undoubtedly many more connections awaiting discovery in the account books of large Yorkshire estates.

Most significant of the Telfords’ relationships, perhaps, was that with Harewood. Letters between the Telfords and the estate steward show that they provided

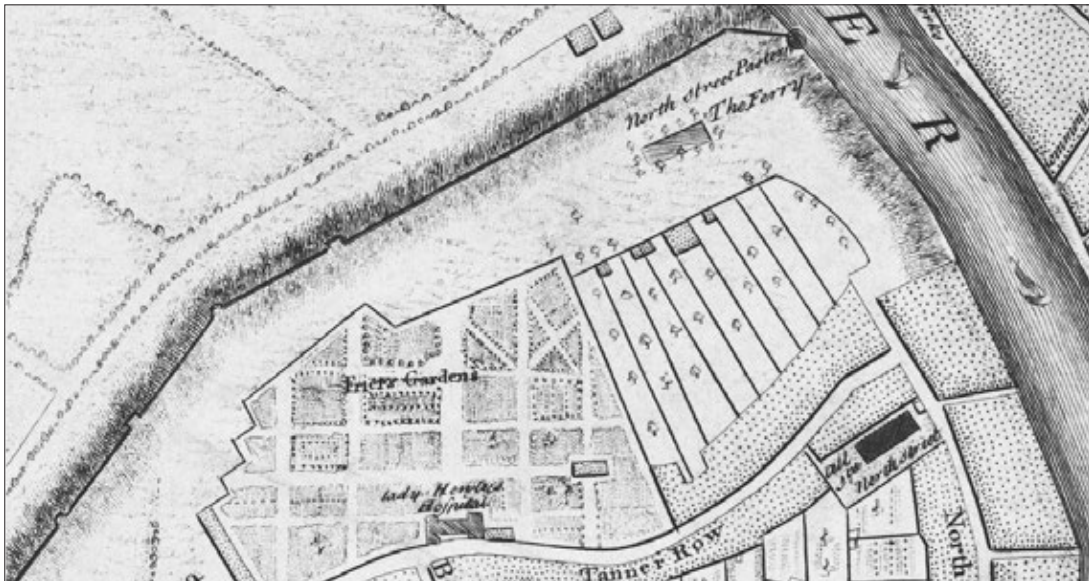


Figure 6: Chassereau’s 1750 Plan of York Showing the ‘Friars Gardens’ and Lady Hewley’s Hospital. (City of York Council/Explore Libraries and Archives Mutual, York. Detail created by author)

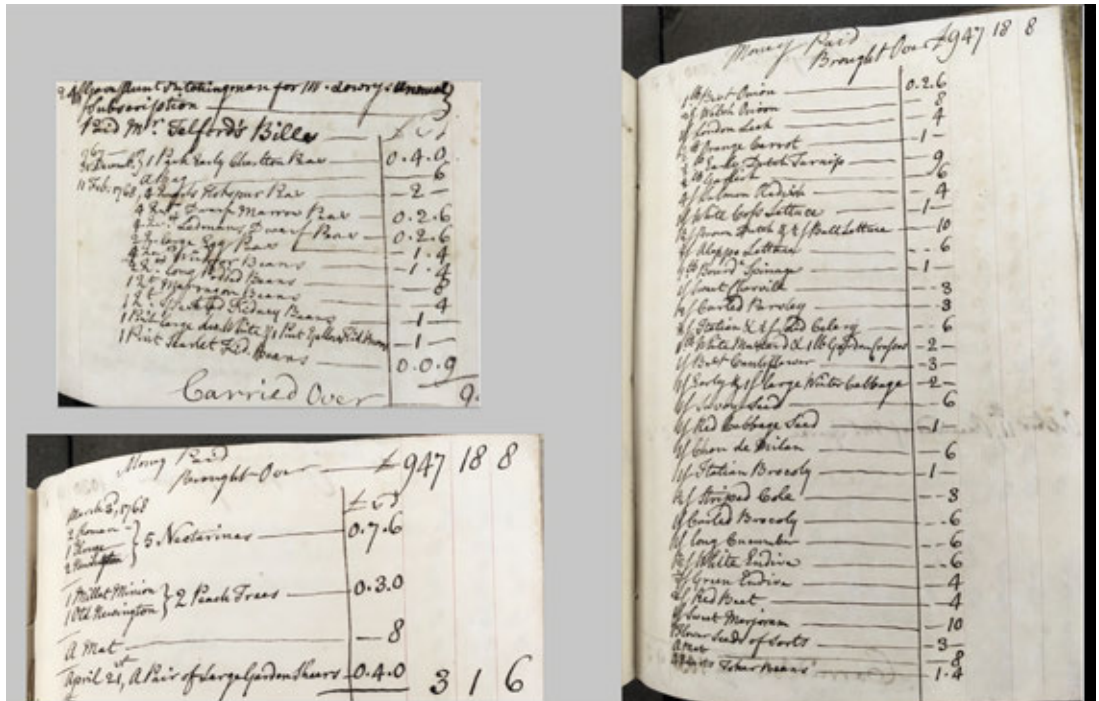


Figure 7: William Marwood's Account Books 1776-1779.  
(North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDU 169/1-3. Detail created by author)



Figure 8: H. Teesdale & Co., & C. Stocking, Map of Yorkshire, 1828.  
(courtesy of National Library of Scotland. Detail created by author)

plantation trees, quickwoods, roses, fruit trees, garden tools and simply ‘wood’ during the creation of the Lascelles estate between, at least, 1754 and 1762 (Figure 9). John Telford iii’s (1744-1830) relationship with Samuel Popplewell, the steward, ran to exchanging personal gifts of plants and possibly produce.<sup>29</sup>

Business was not just with individual estate owners. In 1740 the nursery provided and planted limes and elms for the Corporation’s New Walk along the Ouse. Figure 10 hints at how York saw itself at this time. For centuries, the grand families of Yorkshire had kept second houses in York, and Georgian York had areas of ‘polite’ activity: the Assembly Rooms designed by Richard, Lord Burlington (1730-2); the theatre (1744); the coffee houses; and the racecourse that Telfords had helped to level and drain (c 1730). Being a tenant of the Lady Hewley Trust also brought business; in 1789 Telfords were paid for tree planting at West Ayton, one of the Trust’s estates, and in 1792 they were asked for their opinion on creating a fifty-foot plantation along two sides of a moor. They subsequently planted up two and a half acres of trees.<sup>30</sup>

A highly decorative one-page catalogue from the Telfords (undated, but John and George in the title shows it to be post-1770) focuses largely on seeds and



Figure 10: Nathan Drake, *The New Terrace Walk, York, 1756, YORAG 584.*  
(courtesy York Museums Trust, via Art UK)

some flower roots, but this is a limited list of what was on offer from the nursery (Figure 11). A more workaday catalogue of 1775 (Figures 12 and 13) shows how extensive the business now was but also that it was dominated by trees: eight of the 18 pages are dedicated to them. Transplanted one-foot beeches could be provided by the thousand at £2.0s.0d (today £4,190.00, £4.19p each). By contrast, a single, striped-leaved (presumably variegated), yellow-flowering horse

York November 23, 1757  
'By the order you left,  
have herewith sent yr  
Trees, & tools  
abovementioned, all  
which I hope will please.  
The pruning knives you  
took along with you,  
that there nothing  
remains but of seeds  
which shall be sent as  
soon as my new stock  
arrives.'

- 1 Garden Spade
- 2 Middle Siz'd hoes
- 2 Shovells
- Dwarf white kidney beans 2 qts
- Small hand saw

30 Roses  
of sorts

Figure 9: Letter from Telfords to Mr Popplewell, Harewood. 1757.  
(With kind permission, Harewood House Trust and West Yorkshire Archive Service)



**A CATALOGUE of SEEDS, &c.**  
 Sold by **JOHN and GEORGE TELFORD,**  
 NURSERYMEN and SEEDSMEN in *Tanner-Row, YORK.*

**Seeds of Roots.**  
**S**TRASBURG Onion  
 Spanish Onion  
 Portugal Onion  
 Blood-red Onion  
 Silver Skin's Onion  
 Welsh Onion  
 London Leak  
 London Orange Carrot  
 Early Horse ditto  
 Swelling Parsley  
 Sorrel  
 Saffron  
 Skirret  
 Early Dutch Turnep  
 Early Swiss Turnep  
 White Norfolk Turnep  
 Red Norfolk Turnep  
 Long French Turnep  
 Yellow Turnep  
 Rocambole  
 Shallot  
 Garlic Heads

**Sallad Seeds, &c.**  
**E**arly Short-top'd Radish  
 London Radish  
 White Spanish Radish  
 Chaga Lettuce  
 Brown Dutch Lettuce  
 Royal Brown Dutch ditto  
 Green Dutch Lettuce  
 Tennis Ball Lettuce  
 Early-fringe Cabbage ditto  
 Siles's Lettuce  
 Imperial Lettuce  
 White Calf Lettuce  
 Green Calf Lettuce  
 Red Calf Lettuce  
 Aleppo, or Spotted Calf ditto  
 Caplain Lettuce  
 French Spinage  
 Rounder Spinage  
 Common White Beet  
 Swiss Beet  
 Red Beet  
 Green-top'd Red Beet  
 Turnep-rooted Red ditto  
 Green Cooled Endive  
 White Cooled Endive  
 Italian Endive  
 End Orach  
 White Orach  
 Swiss Fennel  
 Common Fennel  
 Curled Parsley  
 Dutch Parsley  
 Italian Celery  
 Solid Celery  
 Celery  
 Celandine Celery

**Pot and Sweet Herb Seeds.**  
**T**hymer  
 Water Savory  
 Summer-Savory  
 Sweet Majorana  
 Put-Majorana  
 Sweet Basil  
 Dew of Annonis  
 Lavender  
 Clary  
 Double-Jerusalem's ditto  
 White Candy Tuft

Spanish Carrots  
 French Carrot  
 Sweet Chervil  
 Green Parsley  
 Golden Parsley  
 Corn Salad  
 White Medford  
 Brown Medford  
 Garden Cress  
 Curled Cress  
 Large Nibition  
 Dwarf Nibition  
 Dutch Asparagus  
 Roman's Asparagus  
 Bell Cauliflower, Early  
 Late Cauliflower  
 Bell Early Cabbage  
 Early Dutch Cabbage  
 Early Savoy Cabbage  
 Superior Cabbage  
 Ruffa Cabbage  
 Red Cabbage  
 Green Savoy Cabbage  
 Yellow Savoy Cabbage  
 Turnep Cabbage  
 Reynolds's Turnep Cabbage  
 Italian Purple Broccoli  
 Cauliflower Broccoli  
 Chew de Milan  
 Green Curled Thistle's'd Cole  
 Harbrough Cole  
 Jerusalem Cole  
 Watercress Cole  
 Jag-leaved Cole  
 Early Choke Cucumber  
 Early Pickly Cucumber  
 Long Pickly Cucumber  
 Short Pickly Cucumber  
 Green Turkey Cucumber  
 White Turkey Cucumber  
 Roman Long Cucumber  
 Fine Cucumber Minor, Sorts  
 Roman Melon  
 Italian Melon, and several others  
 Pumpkins  
 Gourds, of Sorts

**Physical Seeds.**  
**C**ashes  
 Le Scary-Grass  
 Anglica  
 English Tobacco  
 Dill  
 Common Fennel  
 Sweet Fennel  
 Catwary

**Perennial Flower Seeds.**  
**S**ocket Lychnis  
 Red Campion, Red  
 Painted Lady ditto  
 R.d. Vayolan  
 Greek Vayolan  
 Tuberosum  
 Everlasting Peas  
 Double Hollyhock  
 Carnation  
 Phlox's'd Pink  
 Mignon, or Dwarf Pink  
 Double Columbine  
 Gloe Tulle  
 Purple Lisaria  
 Indian Root

**Biennial Flower Seeds.**  
**B**rommion Stock  
 Queen's Stock  
 White Stock  
 Fanned Lady Sweet William  
 Dark-ed  
 Soap-Dragon  
 French Honey-suckle  
 Bloody Wall-Flower  
 Canterbury Bells  
 Honey, or Sattia Flower  
 Royal-rose's Jordan Pink  
 Small-rose's ditto  
 Horn-Poppy  
 Acanthaceum

**Annual Flower Seeds.**  
**S**carlet ten Weeks Stock  
 Purple ten Weeks Stock  
 Purple Swallow ditto  
 White Swallow ditto  
 White ten Weeks stock  
 Dew of Annonis  
 Dwarf Ly-bans  
 Double Red Larkspur  
 Double-Jerusalem's ditto  
 White Candy Tuft

Purple Candy Tuft  
 Venus Navicolum  
 Venus Looking-Glass  
 Heliodora  
 Tall Double Sun-Flower  
 Dwarf Double ditto  
 Fox Adams  
 Large Dutch Poppy  
 Small Dutch Poppy  
 Scarlet Zinnia  
 Red Hawkweed  
 Annual Snap-Dragon  
 Lavatera  
 Bladder Knotm  
 Curled Mallow  
 Purple Mallow  
 Lobel's Catch Fly  
 Double Purple Chias After  
 Double Red ditto  
 Double White ditto  
 Double Sky's'd ditto  
 White Crysothemum  
 Yellow ditto  
 Prince's Feather  
 Lane Eye Blooming  
 Yellow Lupinus  
 White Lupinus  
 Pink Lupinus  
 Large Blue Lupinus  
 Small Blue Lupinus  
 Purple Sweet Peas  
 Painted Lady Sweet Peas  
 White Sweet Peas  
 Tennis Peas, or Scarlet Lupinus  
 Spanish Painted Lady Peas  
 Porficaria  
 Bistula of Sorts  
 Nigella Romana  
 Spanish or Dwarf Nigella  
 Saxia  
 Catnip  
 Hedgehogs  
 Convolvulus Major  
 Small Scarlet Convolvulus  
 Scilla's Convolvulus Minor  
 African Marjorie  
 French Marjorie  
 Dwarf French ditto  
 Double-Sky's'd French ditto  
 Cambray's Marjorie  
 Cape Marjorie  
 Capucians, of Sorts  
 Marjorie of Peas  
 Sweet Sultan  
 Yellow Sweet Sultan  
 French Bush Ball  
 Mignonet  
 Upright Rofida  
 French Plant  
 Madagascra, or Egg Plant  
 Tomatoes, or Love Apple  
 Amaranthaceae  
 Amaranthaceae Tri-olor  
 Globe Amaranth, of Sorts  
 Double-Sky's'd Ballon, of Sorts  
 Female Ballon

**Tree Seeds.**  
**C**Ypress  
 Silver Fir  
 Spruce ditto  
 Larch  
 Scotch Fir  
 Anem  
 Evergreen Oak  
 Weymouth Pine  
 Chair Pine  
 Pinaster  
 Scotch Pine  
 Beech Mast

**Seeds to improve Land.**  
**R**ED Clover  
 White Dutch Clover  
 Trifol  
 Rich Grass  
 Rye Grass  
 Natural Grass  
 Timothy Grass  
 Lu Loricum  
 Broom Grass  
 Buck Wheat  
 Tare Vetch  
 Red Sorts, of Sorts  
 French Fava

**Peas and Beans.**  
**E**arly Galton Harrow Peas  
 Early Charlott ditto  
 Greenish, or Early Days ditto  
 Master's Harrow Peas  
 Long Harrow Peas  
 Dwarf Marrow Peas  
 Large Marrow Peas  
 Imperial Green Marrow ditto  
 Large Egg ditto  
 Emperor's ditto  
 White Rose ditto  
 Blue Rose ditto  
 Grey Rose ditto  
 Tall one-bear sugar ditto  
 Dwarf sugar ditto  
 Hault, or Crown Peas  
 Le-don's Dwarf ditto  
 Wagon Peas

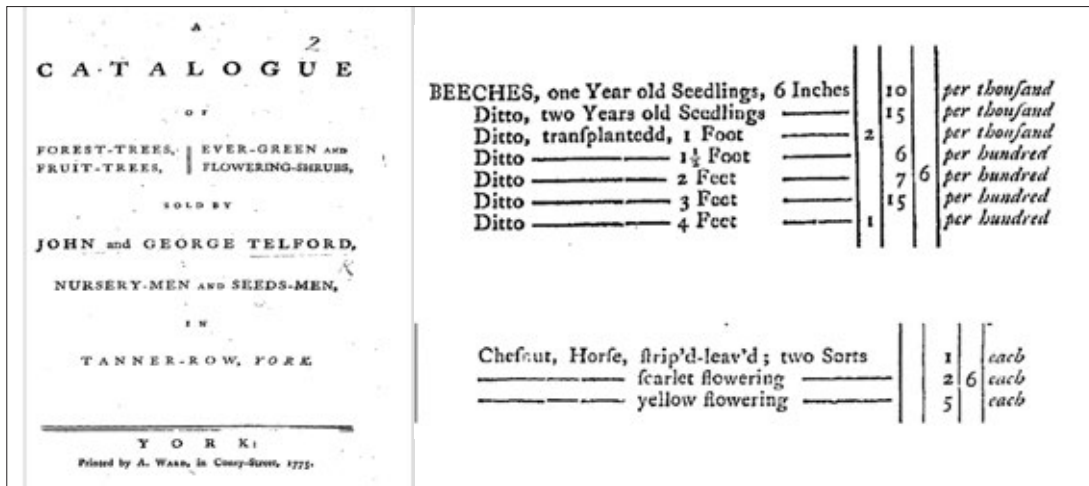
Double Stramonium  
 Scarlet Apocynum  
 Centaury, or Honeysweet  
 Palma Christi Minor  
 Palma Christi Major  
 Diamond Fiddle  
 With several others

**Flower Roots.**  
**R**anunculus  
 Anemone  
 Tulip  
 Crocus  
 Hyacinth  
 Rhodod  
 Marjorie  
 Tuberos  
 Cowslip Lily  
 Crown Imperial  
 Iris, of Sorts  
 Fritillaria  
 Orange Lily  
 With most Sorts of Rhodod-rooted  
 of Perennial Flower

**Fruit Trees.**  
**P**eaches  
 Nectarines  
 Apples  
 Cherries  
 Quinces  
 Apples  
 Medlars  
 Vines  
 Mellons  
 Cucumbers  
 Carrots  
 Radishes  
 Fennels  
 With most Sorts of French Trees,  
 Evergreens, Flowering Shrubs,  
 and Green-house Plants, also  
 Q. &c.

Bafa-Matts, Spades, Rakes, Hoes, Sheers, Lines, and Pruning Knives; Cabbage, Cauliflower, Artichoke, and Asparagus Plants:  
 With several other Things for the Use of Gardeners.

Figure 11: 'A Catalogue of Seeds &c Sold by John and George Telford, Nurserymen and Seedsmen in Tanner Row, York', undated. (Darley of Aldby archive, North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDA)



Figures 12 (left) and 13: Catalogue of John and George Telford, 1775. Front page and page with Beech and Chestnut prices. (Eighteenth Century Collections Online)

chestnut would cost the aspiring gardener 5s.0d (£667.00).<sup>31</sup> Other sections in the catalogue are devoted to fruit trees and bushes (one page), evergreen and flowering shrubs, including roses, climbers, and some herbs (eight pages).

The accounts of tree-planting and providing trees for others to plant and the volume of trees on offer in the catalogue indicate the Friars' Gardens were only a small part of the Telfords' operations. To be able to provide tree slips even to only one customer a year, on the scale implied in the catalogue, clearly required much land somewhere. Some of this was at Holgate: in 1837, when Thomas Backhouse was looking for a site to replace Friars' Gardens as the railway came near, he said that at least some of the land being leased at Holgate was so exhausted with years of tree growing that it was suitable only for tilling.<sup>32</sup>

When he died in 1770, John Telford ii left an estate at Wigginton (and his houses in Grape Lane) to his wife and it seems possible that the Telfords had bought the Wigginton estate because of the Hewley link.<sup>33</sup> Harvey raised the question of whether Wigginton might be one of the other production sites for the nursery; while this is possible, by 1788 the estate was being rented out to others, as the report of a fire in a barn makes clear.<sup>34</sup> By this stage, John ii's sons, John iii and George ii (1749-1834) had bought an estate at Eske in the East Riding, close to Beverley and Hull.<sup>35</sup> While Eske is some distance from York by road, the estate is on the River Hull, which feeds into the Humber, so boat traffic to York would have been entirely possible.

Other land in Yorkshire has been found associated with the Telfords. In 1741 John Telford (either i or ii) voted for George Fox in a Parliamentary election; his place of abode was given as York, but the entitlement to vote came as a freeholder at Kirk (Church) Fenton. Property dealings in Bierley, Baildon and Bingley, in the West Riding, and the Manor of Lund in the East Riding, bought from the Grimston estate at Kilnwick, all indicate ownership of significant parcels of land.<sup>36</sup>

Although Telfords transferred their business to the Backhouses in 1816 they continued as leaseholders of nursery lands, both at Tanner Row (up to 1824) and at Holgate (possibly up to 1845). John Telford iii seems to have remained more involved than his brother George ii, living on the site for some years; when the Hewley Trustees leased the gardens to Backhouses they 'offered to let Mr John Telford live in the dwelling house and have the attached garden there for life, if he wished'.<sup>37</sup> A York directory for 1830 confirms that he did so wish, recording John Telford, 'gent' living at 28 Tanner Row.<sup>38</sup>

However, horticultural activity that stretched back to the Dissolution, and very likely before, ceased in the late 1830s, when the campaign in which Thomas Backhouse had been closely involved - to bring the railway, with all its freight possibilities, to York - was successful. The first York railway station was built on 'the garden lately occupied by Messrs. T. and J. Backhouse' (Figure 14).<sup>39</sup>

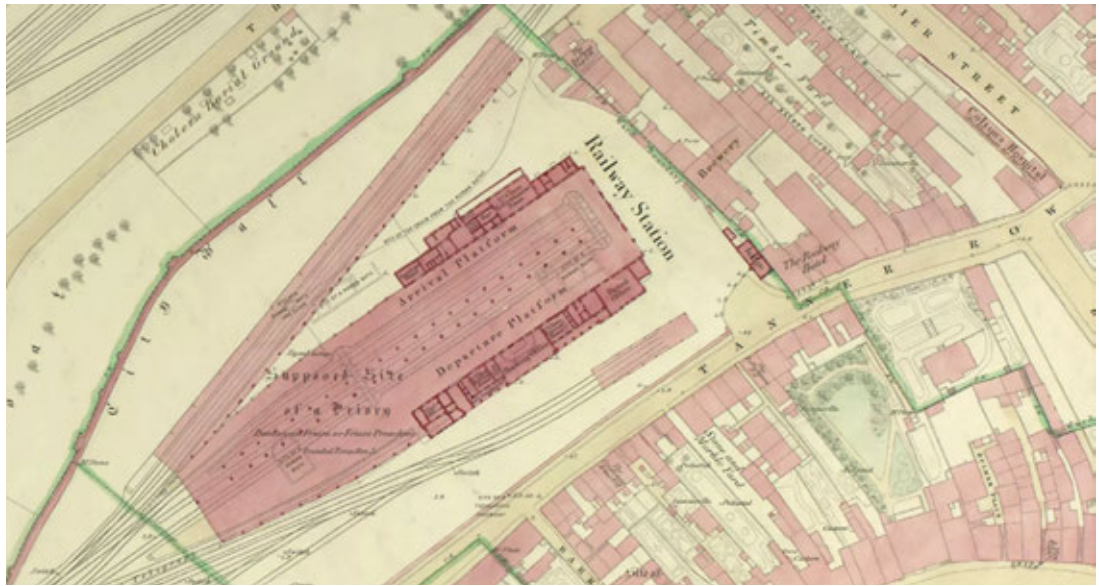


Figure 14: Former site of Backhouse Nursery in Tanner Row. Survey 1849 - 1851 by Captain Tucker R.E. for the Ordnance Map Office. (York Council Archaeology|Mapbox|OS OpenData. Detail created by author)

### The Riggs

Perhaps in response to the approach of the railway, in 1835/6 Backhouses bought another well-established nursery – Riggs. This was south of York city centre, in Fishergate, and had been established by Thomas Rigg (1747-1835). Harvey describes Riggs as one of three nurseries in Yorkshire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (the others being Telfords and Perfects of Pontefract) that had ‘an importance out of all proportion to their economic standing’. In the Riggs’ case, he states, this was mainly for its ‘national fame as the source of the best seed of Early York Cabbage’.<sup>40</sup>

It has not been possible to establish Thomas Rigg’s place of birth, but his death record suggests that he was born in 1747. He was a gardener of Bilton, about eight miles to the west of York, when he married Elizabeth Hopps on 3 May 1773, and when his son, Thomas ii (1774-1811), was baptised. (Figure 15).<sup>41</sup> Bilton is the location of Bilton Hall, a grade II listed building of Tudor/Jacobean origins. The property of the Stockdale family from the mid-seventeenth century, after financial problems related to the South Sea Bubble, it was sold and eventually acquired in 1742 by a John Watson of Malton.<sup>42</sup> Given the small size of the village it seems possible that Thomas i was a gardener at the Hall, although where he obtained the resources to start up a nursery in York remains unknown.

Thomas i was admitted Freeman of the City of York (by order of the Lord Mayor, not by patrimony) in 1777,<sup>43</sup> which suggests it was at this point that he started the business in York, and he immediately took on an apprentice, Edward Broggin.<sup>44</sup> Later, the Freeman records note that Thomas ii was apprenticed to his father on 21 December 1784 (so aged only 10/11 years), by indenture. Thomas ii was admitted as a Freeman in 1803, aged 29, but died in 1811 at only 37 of ‘palpitation of the heart’.<sup>45</sup> Thomas i’s younger son John (1777-1833) also joined the nursery business.

Harvey says that Thomas Rigg i (1747-1835) established the nursery first as a ‘suburban garden in the old precinct of St Andrew’s Priory by Fishergate’, and that it then grew to some 30 acres.<sup>46</sup> It has been difficult to confirm this, and there is no sign of horticultural activity on the site that became Riggs’ nursery on the seventeenth century maps above. However, both Chassereau in 1750 and Jeffery in 1751 show a nursery

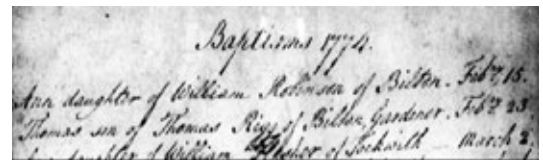


Figure 15: Baptismal Record, Thomas, son of Thomas Rigg of Bilton, Gardener, February 1774.

(Source: Findmypast, see Note 41.

Detail created by author)

or market garden off Fishergate, some 25 years before Thomas became a Freeman (Figures 16 and 17) which perhaps suggests that he took over an existing nursery or market garden.

There is less archival and newspaper evidence against which to judge the significance of the Riggs, but sufficient to give a sense of the nursery's operations. Early nineteenth century advertisements show that they were doing more than selling cabbage seeds – fruit and forest trees, shrubs, greenhouse plants, and bulbs are all mentioned. They acted as an employment agency for gardeners, and the later advert shows how much they charged for large orders of plantation trees and quick woods. As well as providing trees, they also offered to plant them, on contract and with a guarantee for three

years. That Riggs were advertising in Hull newspapers perhaps suggests seeking sales away from markets where Telfords were active (Figures 18a, 18b).

The 1818 advertisement offered a range of three- and four-year old 'seed-bed' as well as transplanted quickwoods. An agreement with 'Mr Spofforth', steward for Admiral Southern at a yet unidentified estate somewhere near the Humber, shows that like the Telfords, Riggs were able to provide large quantities of young trees for plantations, and also shows the nature of the contract (Figure 19). This and the advertisements indicate that Riggs must have had substantial slip nurseries somewhere.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 16: Site later the Rigg nursery, 1751. 'The county of York survey'd in MDCCLXVII, VIII, IX and MDCCLXX. Engraved by Thomas Jefferys'. (Marwoods of Busby archive, North Yorkshire County Record Office. ZDU. Detail created by author)

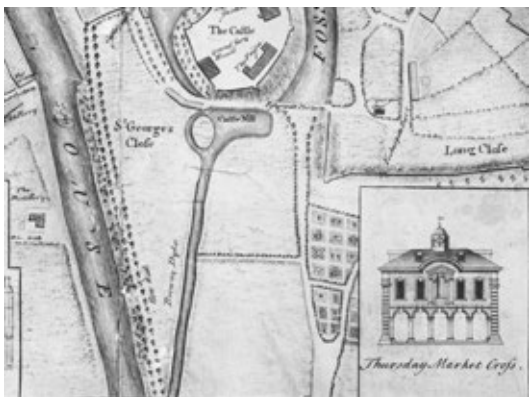


Figure 17: Site later the Rigg nursery, by Chassereau, 1750. (City of York Council/Explore Libraries and Archives Mutual, York. Detail created by author)

**THOMAS RIGG & SON,  
NURSERYMEN, SEEDSMEN, & FLORISTS,  
IN FISHERGATE, FULFORD-ROAD,  
YORK,**

**B**E G leave to acquaint Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Planters, that they have a large Assortment of all kinds of Forest Trees, of various sizes and ages, which they will sell on low terms; also a large quantity of exceeding fine one-year Seedling Larch, at 5s. and 6s. per 1000; also fine one-year Scotch Fir, at 1s. 6d. per 1000; two year ditto, remarkably fine stout Plants, at 3s. per 1000; Ash, one year, at 2s. per 1000; Oak two year Seedlings, at 10s. per 1000; ditto, three year, very fine, at 20s. per 1000; Quickwood, two year Seedlings, for Transplanting, at 4s. per 1000; ditto, for Hedge-row Planting, at 7s. 6d. to 10s. per 1000; ditto, Transplanted, at 12s. 6d. per 1000. A large Assortment of the choicest kinds of Apple Trees, beautifully trained for Espaliers; also Pears, Plums, Cherries, Peaches, Nectarines, and Apricots, trained and untrained, of the best kinds. Also all kinds of Evergreen and Flowering Shrubs, very fine, stout, and well rooted Plants. Also a good Collection of Perennial, Biennial, and Bulbous-rooted Flowers; Kitchen Garden and Flower Seeds, of the best quality.

Also Dutch Hyacinths, Narcissus, Jonquills, &c. fresh imported from Holland; fine double and single Anemones, Ranunculus, Tulips, &c. &c.

T. R. and Son engage to Plant by Contract, in the best manner, and on reasonable Terms, and warranted for three Years.

N. B. T. R. and Son are in want of a Person who has a thorough knowledge of the NURSERY BUSINESS, in all its Branches, to act as Foreman in the Nurseries: None need apply that cannot give a satisfactory reference for sobriety, steadiness, &c.

☞ For particulars, apply as above; if by Letter, post-paid.

YORK, October 20th, 1814

Figure 18a: Advertisement for Riggs Nursery, Hull Packet, 1 November 1814 (British Library Newspapers)

**QUICKWOOD, FOREST TREES, &c.**

**THOMAS RIGG & SON,**  
**NURSEYMEN, SEEDSMEN, &c. &c.**  
 IN FISHERGATE, YORK,

**B**EG leave to acquaint Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Planters, that they have for Sale, this Season, a large Quantity of Three and Four Years' old Seed-bed QUICKWOOD; also, a large Quantity of Three and Four Years' transplanted Ditto: All kinds of FOAMY TREES; Evergreen and Flowering SHRUBS; and all kinds of FRUIT TREES, Standards and Dwarf, viz. Peaches, Nectarines, Apricots, Pears, Plums, Cherries, and Apple Trees, handsomely trained for Walls and Espaliers, and of the best sorts; also, all kinds of Kitchen Garden and Flower SEEDS and ROOTS; in great variety, and of the best quality.—Fine New WEeping BEECH.

Gentlemen may be supplied with experienced GARDENERS.

YORK, November 16th, 1818.

Figure 18b: Advertisement for Riggs Nursery, Hull Packet 17 November 1818 (British Library Newspapers)

Between 1791 and 1796, Riggs also bought from at least one other nursery (Caldwells of Knutsford), predominantly soft fruit and fruit trees, although whether to establish their own stocks or to fulfil orders is not known.<sup>48</sup> Only one Riggs catalogue has been discovered so far, from a late stage in their history, 1830, at Figure 20.

Newspaper reports show that Riggs exhibited plants early in the history of the Yorkshire flower shows, often competing directly with Backhouses. For example, in June 1828 Thomas Houldsworth of Riggs shared first prize for the Hardy Bouquet class with Backhouses, because the Council felt they were of equal merit.<sup>49</sup> In September 1828 Riggs came second to Henry Baines of Backhouses;<sup>50</sup> while in October 1829 they came first in the same class.<sup>51</sup> However, they seem to be in a different league from Backhouses, from this comment on the June 1830 show of the York Horticultural Society:

*'At the end of the ... table was also displayed a superb hardy bouquet from the gardens of Mr Rigg, and which though but a little David, when*

October 22, 1829

To be planted with good trees sizes as below at Five Pounds per Acre.

The Plantation to be filled up at the expiration of the second and third year, with Trees sorts and sizes below all that are dead.

Those destroyed by Hares Rabbits or Cattle we don't replace.

Terms of payment. Three fourths of the money soon as the Plantation is planted the remainder at the expiration of the Third year when the Plantation is finished.

300 Oaks ½ foot high  
 300 Spruce Do. . . Do.  
 2000 Larch Do. . . Do.

*To be planted with good trees sizes as below of Five Pounds per Acre*

*The Plantation to be filled up at the expiration of the second and third year, with Trees sorts and sizes below all that are dead.*

*Those destroyed by Hares Rabbits or Cattle we don't replace*

*Terms of Payment, Three fourths of the Money soon as the Plantation is planted the remainder at the expiration of the Third year when the Plantation is finished*

*300 Oaks ½ foot high*  
*300 Spruce Do. . . Do.*  
*2000 Larch Do. . . Do. . .* } *For the Acre*

*Done. Nov 14 1829 Agreed with Mr Riggs on the above terms but to have in addition 500 more Larch upon the Acre - Making in the whole three thousand six hundred Trees upon the Acre - The Trees to be kept up for three Years. — (signed) Sam<sup>r</sup> Spofforth*

Figure 19: Letter from Riggs to Mr Spofforth 1829, Regarding Contract for Tree Planting. (Sotherton-Escourt Family Estate Records, East Riding Archives, ERAL: DDSE 2//32/6)

**SEEDLING AND TRANSPLANTED  
FOREST TREES,**  
SOLD BY  
**THOS. RIGG AND SON,  
NURSERYMEN,  
YORK.**

No. 42 | 182 | 3

ASH, one year old seedlings	2 1/2	Per 1000	FIR, Bals of Gilead, two year old seedlings	2 1/2	Per 1000
two year old ditto	3 1/2		three year old ditto	4 1/2	
ALDER, one year old ditto	1 1/2		HAZEL, one year old ditto	1 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		HOLLY, two year old ditto	2 1/2	
BEECH, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
BIRCH, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
CHESTNUT, Horse, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
SPANISH, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
CHERRY, WILD, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
ELM, Wych, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
FIR, Scotch, one year old ditto	1 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
SPRUCE, two year old ditto	2 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
three year old ditto	3 1/2		two year old ditto	2 1/2	
Transplanted two years			two year old ditto	2 1/2	
old ditto			two year old ditto	2 1/2	

**TRANSPLANTED FOREST TREES, &c.**

ASH, Transplanted	1 1/2	Per 100	HOLLY, Green	1 1/2	Per 100
ALDER	1 1/2		HAZEL	1 1/2	
BEECH	1 1/2		HUNTERMAN	1 1/2	
BIRCH	1 1/2		LARCH, Common	1 1/2	
BURSH	1 1/2		LARCH	1 1/2	
CHESTNUT, Horse	1 1/2		LIME	1 1/2	
SPANISH	1 1/2		MAPLE, ENGLISH	1 1/2	
ELM, Wych	1 1/2		OAK	1 1/2	
ENGLISH, Crawford	1 1/2		PINE, Land Weymouth	1 1/2	
FIR, Bals of Gilead	1 1/2		PRIVET, European	1 1/2	
SILVER	1 1/2		POPLAR, Black Italian	1 1/2	
SCOTCH	1 1/2		ELDE THORN	1 1/2	
SPRUCE	1 1/2		SPANISH	1 1/2	
			THORN	1 1/2	

Also, all sorts of European and American Shrubs, and all kinds of the choicest sorts of Fruit Trees, Dwarfed, and Standards, mostly raised for Walls or Fruiting Houses, viz: Peach, Strawberry, Apricot, Pear, Plum, Cherry, Apple, &c. &c.  
I have a good collection of Green House Plants, Dutch Bulbs, and other Italian and Roman called Potentilla Flower  
Bones, with all kinds of Kitchen Garden and Flower Seeds, Garden Tools, &c. &c.  
By Thomas RIGG in Person  
Ground Planted by the Acre, on mortgage, to be supplied with experienced Gardeners  
N. B. The prices given are only estimates.

Figure 20: Annotated Riggs Catalogue, 1830. (STK/5/2, City of York Council/Explore Libraries and Archives Mutual, York.

compared with the Goliath-like colossal pile of flowers, furnished by the gardener to Messrs. Backhouse ... yet from the excellence of the flowers and their tasteful arrangement, it divided the honours of the day with its stupendous and magnificent compeer'.<sup>52</sup>

That *Herald* also lists the greenhouse plants shown by Riggs, nowhere near the number shown by Backhouses.

This competition was only two months before a tragedy. In 1810 John Rigg married Ann Gorwood of the parish of St Michael Spurriergate, and between 1811 and 1830 Ann bore 14 children. Of these, six died in infancy or early childhood. On 23 August 1830, seven of their eight surviving children went rowing on the river Ouse at around 3pm, with a friend, Grace Robinson from Ayton, near Scarborough, and Thomas Sellers, the son of Mr Sellers of the Falcon Inn, York. About an hour after setting out, when they had reached just above Acomb Landing, they met a keel in full sail

moving downriver which hit and overturned the rowing boat. All the young people were thrown into the river and only Jessie Rigg and Thomas Sellers survived.<sup>53</sup> A subsequent inquest ruled that the keel, whose crew were reported coincidentally to have 'taken many cargoes of goods for the Messrs Rigg into the West of Yorkshire',<sup>54</sup> had been 'inadequately manned and improperly managed' and a deodand of £21 was imposed on the vessel.<sup>55</sup>

The impact of the drowning of six children from the same family was felt deeply all over York and beyond. Charles Lamb is said to have written 'some lines of verse about the incident' and York churches of all denominations marked the tragedy with special sermons and services.<sup>56</sup> Some 14,000 to 15,000 people lined the streets for the funeral, which was held at the family's parish church of St Lawrence. The coffins were carried by:

*'Rigg's men, all of whom (twenty in number) attended the funeral and testified by their deep and sincere sorrow, their regret for the loss of those who had always been to them kind and attentive masters and friends'.*<sup>57</sup>

This reference to 'kind and attentive masters' underlines that sons Thomas Gorwood (1812-1830) and John ii (1815-1830) were already active in running the nursery. They had returned only that week from an eight-week business journey carried out because of their grandfather's ill health and had been due to start on another the day after the accident.<sup>58</sup>

It is not surprising that the parents were reported as prostrate with grief nor, perhaps, that John i died less than three years later, if not from 'palpitations of the heart' like his brother, Thomas ii, then surely from a broken heart. A monument to the children was erected in St Lawrence's churchyard in 1831, funded by public subscription. Over the years it fell into disrepair but was restored by York Civic Trust in 2016 and re-dedicated by Archbishop Sentamu in March 2017, thus bringing the Rigg family into the memory of York again (Figure 21).<sup>59</sup>

Despite it all Mrs Rigg, supported by her elderly and frail father-in-law, Thomas i, continued the nursery business for some time after her husband's death, perhaps indicating that she had played a role in running the business before these events. By summer 1833, Riggs were competing again at the York flower shows, providing show bouquets and winning some prizes, mostly for vegetables and dahlias, and continued to do so into 1834.<sup>60</sup>

What the future of the Rigg nursery would have been had the two young Rigg men not died, followed soon after by their father, cannot be judged at this remove. But Harvey's assessment of the nursery's significance as being largely associated with a cabbage perhaps undersells its importance. It clearly operated across a range of horticultural areas, functioning as an employment agency for gardeners and planting estates and gardens on a contractual basis. Whether or not the Rigg nursery began on a site originally owned by St Andrew's priory, it became substantial in size, with additional purchases of land in the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

When the business was put up for auction in 1833, as well as the stock-in-trade and equipment, there were 24 acres of freehold land between Heslington Road and the York Barracks occupied as nursery ground, and another six acres, three miles from York on the Selby Road. In addition, there was a leasehold house with 15 acres of land, and outbuildings, also being used as a nursery.<sup>62</sup> The first auction was apparently not wholly successful, as the business and the 24 acres of freehold land were advertised again in 1835, when Thomas Backhouse bought the nursery as a going concern. York's detailed Ordnance Office map of 1852 gives an

idea of the size and scope of the Backhouse nursery off Fishergate and only three years before they left it to consolidate all their activity at Holgate (Figure 22).



Figure 22: Backhouse's Nursery, Fishergate. Survey 1849 - 1851 by Captain Tucker R.E. for the Ordnance Map Office. (York Council Archaeology|Mapbox|OS OpenData. Detail created by author)



Figure 21: Rigg Family Monument, St Lawrence's Church, York. 1831, restored 2016 (Author)

### **Development of the Backhouse Nursery**

Having described the two nursery businesses that they bought to establish and develop their own company, the paper now turns to the lives of Thomas and James Backhouse. As shown above, the Telford nursery was important in the northern horticultural scene and the family had become affluent land-owners who presumably no longer wanted to continue in the trade. They ended their family's association with the massive changes in horticulture seen since the seventeenth century. How did Thomas and James, who were just 23 and 21 years old in 1815, come to take on such a significant business?

More is known of James Backhouse's life, mainly because of his sister Sarah's memoir, which drew on his own writings. He attended boarding school in Leeds and after leaving became an assistant to two Quakers who were in the grocery, drug and chemical business in Darlington, his home town. However, a lung complaint was made worse by working indoors so James looked for an outdoor occupation. He worked with his uncle, Jonathan Backhouse, pruning larches on his plantation and found that the work improved his health.<sup>63</sup>

During his teenage years James became a keen botanist, encouraged by and botanising with members of his family and others, and corresponding with both Nathaniel Winch (1768-1838), the north-eastern botanist, and with James Edward Smith (1759-1828), the founder of the Linnean Society. Correspondence with Winch shows interesting aspects of James's personality. In 1812, he wrote to Winch about whether the pyrola he had found and 'Figured' was a new species – his 'Uncle Robson and Cousin W Backhouse' thought it was (Figure 23). Winch was not convinced and the debate between them continued for some time, becoming almost an *idée fixe* for James and into which he drew Smith a year later.<sup>64</sup>

Sarah's memoir narrates that, as his health improved while working outside, and with his growing interest in botany, James looked around for a suitable occupation and found an opportunity for learning about the nursery business in Norwich. The letters to Winch before the move to Norwich and during the first year James spent there possibly throw a different light on this choice. The depressed tone of the letters before James moved suggests a decision perhaps forced on him – he complains that the move will stop him botanising, there is no point continuing to collect specimens for his own herbarium, his ill health has stopped his botanising and so on. Once in Norwich, he reports that the work is so time-consuming there is little opportunity for other than casual botanising.

Davis says that James was trained at the Wagstaffe nursery in Norwich, but recent research on eighteenth and nineteenth century Norwich nurseries has found none of that name.<sup>65</sup> Recently identified evidence from his son (James ii, 1825-1890) shows that James trained at the Mackies nursery, which was the largest in Norwich at the time and had Quaker associations. He continued his links with the nursery, later sending eucalyptus seeds from Tasmania to Frederick Mackie.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike other gardeners, who would typically serve seven-year apprenticeships and then years as journeymen, James trained for only two years. Perhaps this was a 'gentleman's apprenticeship', seen in other accounts of early nurseries.<sup>67</sup> He returned to Darlington in summer 1815, intending to start a nursery business there, but soon learned that the Telfords were selling up. No newspaper advertisement for this sale has been found to date, but perhaps Quaker networks alerted James or another member of the family. James refers to consulting a relative who influenced the decision, and this may have been his cousin Jonathan, who was one of

James's father's executors, and who accompanied him to York to make the purchase. Jonathan and his father were great tree planters, so it is possible that they had had dealings with Telfords.<sup>68</sup> Feeling that he would be unable to manage the business on his own, James asked Thomas to join him and they took possession in 1816. Both would rely on the experienced nursery gardeners they took on when they bought the firm and, as John Telford iii stayed in his house on the Friars' Gardens site after the sale of the nursery, he also may have advised the young Backhouse men in their early years of business.

James moved to York in November 1815, and Thomas soon after, living first in lodgings, then from 1817 at what is now 92 Micklegate, York. Their widowed mother and 'the rest of the family' moved to live with them (Figure 24). However, only nine years after taking the nursery on, James became a minister of the York Monthly Quaker Meeting and was often away from York on religious work. He had married Deborah Lowe (1793-1827) in 1822 and they had three children – Elizabeth (1823-1883), James ii, and Mary, who died at five weeks old, a few months before Deborah herself died. Even before Deborah's death, James was often



Figure 23: James Backhouse, *Pyrola*. Watercolour in letter to N J Winch. 23 January 1812. (courtesy of the Linnean Society, Winch Correspondence, v. 3, 1812-1817)

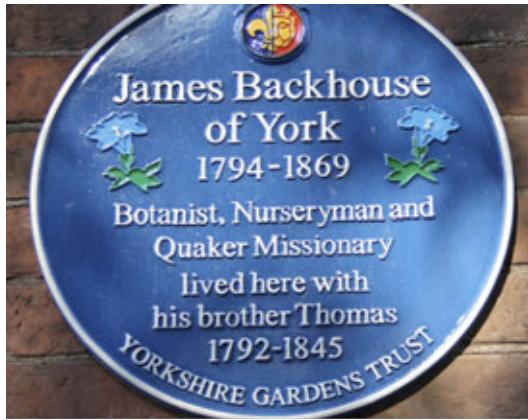


Figure 24: Civic Trust plaque on Backhouse home, 92 Micklegate, York. (courtesy of York Civic Trust)

away on religious work and soon after she died he embarked on a long series of visits to other Meetings in East Anglia and the Midlands. Towards the end of 1830, he became preoccupied with extending his religious and humanitarian work to Australia (an idea that had first come to him while standing in the Norwich nursery). He said that Thomas and ‘all [his] dear relatives’ supported him in his objective, notwithstanding the long absence and the responsibility for James’s children that they would have to take on.<sup>69</sup>

A modern eyebrow might be raised at a father leaving his young children so soon after their mother’s death and for almost ten years (between 1831 and 1841); James was honest enough to acknowledge that he would not have recognised his children on his return.<sup>70</sup> A modern observer might also wonder whether James’s travels in Britain and on the other side of the world were his way of dealing with grief or even the wrong choice of profession. Perhaps the support of his ‘dear relatives’ was a quiet acknowledgement that he was not coping and needed to do something different. Further, Sarah’s memoir records that even after his return from the ten-year journey, first to Australia and then South Africa, James was ‘seldom long together without feeling his mind drawn in Gospel love toward some part of Great Britain’.<sup>71</sup> James himself reported that after his son, James ii, took over the running of the nursery business, he ‘readily made way for my absence from time to time on Gospel errands’, as had Thomas. At this point, James ii was only 19 or 20 years old.<sup>72</sup>

We know very little about Thomas’s early life; the National Dictionary of Biography gives him only a passing mention as James’s brother, rather than as a

significant force in their nursery.<sup>73</sup> But significant he must have been, given James i’s extended absences. Thomas married Hannah Stickney (1796-1827) in 1826, but she died the following year, soon after giving birth to Mary who survived (1827-1867) and only two weeks after James’s wife Deborah. Thomas remarried in 1837 to Abigail Dent (1814-1841), and they had two children, Sarah Jane (1838-1913) and Thomas ii (1840-1889). Abigail died in 1841 and in the same year Thomas largely withdrew from running the business. This had as much to do with his own ill-health as James’s return, as he died only four years later. One wonders whether James would have returned to England at all if Thomas had not been ill. But it would be unfair to suggest that James had little to do with the growth of the nursery. Despite his absolute commitment to his ‘Gospel errands’, he continued to botanise and to send back new or useful plants for the nursery (Figure 25) and he had at least one of his discoveries named in his honour (Figure 26).



Figure 25: *Acacia rotundifolia*, sent by James Backhouse to Kew. Curtis’s *Botanical Magazine*, ser.2:16 (1842-3), tab. 4041. (courtesy of Biodiversity Heritage Library)



Figure 26: *Brunonia australis*, in Edward's *Botanical Register*, 22 (1836), plate 1833, 240248 (courtesy of Biodiversity Heritage Library)

Both in Australia and South Africa, where he travelled next, James wrote about the plants and trees he saw. He compiled an account of the plants of the Norfolk Islands, and sent plants to Kew and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens and corresponded with individuals, who included Alexander McLeay, Colonial Secretary of New South Wales - a keen plantsman.<sup>74</sup> Several of the illustrations in James's account of his visit to Australia, which is otherwise predominantly about his missionary work, are of plants that stimulated his interest. He seemed particularly interested in the girth of ancient forest growth, particularly that of eucalypts, perhaps with a view to their commercial value (Figure 27).

However, it is clear from contemporary press accounts that most people thought that the nursery was Thomas's (Figures 28 and 29). James's own testimony shows that his brother was the business mind behind the

enterprise and he reported that after his long absence abroad, Thomas had looked after his (James's) affairs so well that he was better off financially than when he had left.<sup>75</sup> Further, in 1835/6, when Backhouses bought the Riggs nursery, James was far away, so Thomas must have been the moving force behind this. Thomas also had other business activities that, both immediately and in the longer term, supported the nursery business.

First, he was committed to improving transport in the north, presumably with an eye to his business. Not long after buying the Telford nursery he was involved in creation of the railways: he subscribed in 1818 to the development of the Stockton to Darlington railway and campaigned in person, first for the York and North Midland Railway and later for the Great North of England Railway, the major engineering project needed to link London and Edinburgh, via York and Newcastle. His commitment was not just of time; in 1845 he was reported as having invested almost £81,000 (£103m) in railway 'subscriptions'.<sup>76</sup>

Secondly, he helped to establish secure financial underpinnings for business in York more generally. In 1830, he became a member of the first committee of the York City and County Banking Company and was also a founding member of a mutual insurance company.<sup>77</sup>

Thirdly, Thomas was a partner in the York Flint Glass Company, which had its factory close to the Riggs site in Fishergate. For a man whose business success depended on glasshouses this was surely a wise move.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, there was the Backhouse involvement in tanning. Garden history often refers to the use of tanner's bark to heat glasshouses or 'bark stoves'.<sup>79</sup> Having a tannery next door to a nursery, as the Telfords did at least until the mid-eighteenth century, made perfect sense and the Backhouses seem to have continued the association. On the same day in 1833 that the *York Herald* advertised the sale of the Riggs nursery it also advertised the sale of furniture and goods from Plantation House, 'adjoining Tan Yard ... late in the occupation of Mr. Backhouse'. All enquiries were directed to Thomas Backhouse or to the auctioneer.

Plantation House is seen on the 1892 Ordnance Office map of York, on the corner of what is now Green Dykes Lane and Hull Road, still attached to a tannery (Figure 30). The 'Mr Backhouse' mentioned was Joseph Backhouse (1798 -1881), James's and Thomas's younger brother. A press notice of August 1831 had announced the dissolution of a partnership between

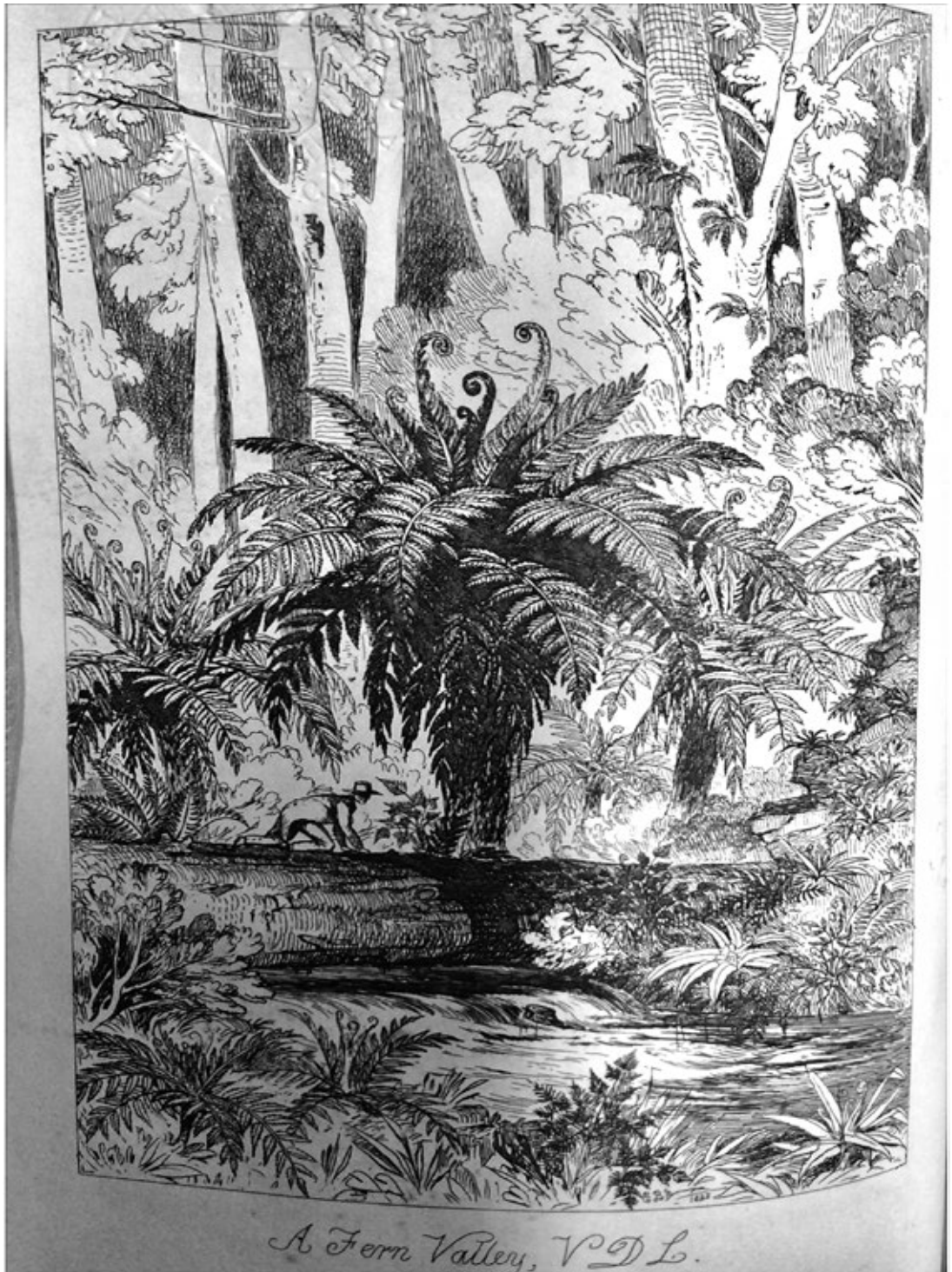


Figure 27: James Backhouse crawling along a Fallen Tree to see a Tree Fern, in his 'Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies, illustrated ...', (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1843). (British Library, public domain, image enhanced by author)

‘Thomas Backhouse, James Backhouse and Joseph Backhouse of York, tanners, so far as regards Joseph Backhouse’, which is presumably why Thomas was then selling the house in 1833.<sup>80</sup> It is not known why Joseph gave up the tanning business or for how long the Backhouses continued in it; presumably it lost its usefulness once coal or steam heating of glasshouses became common.

Overall, then, we see a picture of Thomas as an astute man, playing a game of business chess, moving his own pieces and acquiring others to underpin and further develop his key interest in the nursery. There is little evidence about the operation of the nursery in this early period but it is clear Thomas was not just a financial *eminence gris* but was closely involved in its running. Figure 31 shows him on 16 January 1835 enticing Sir Joseph Radcliffe of Rudding Park near Wetherby with the autumn catalogue of trees and shrubs, displaying his expertise in appraising a landscape for development, recommending someone who could lay out the ground well and cheaply, and offering to make contact with that person on Sir Joseph’s behalf.

Thomas was also a social campaigner, involved in debates about the condition of the working classes and of previously enslaved people in British colonies. He campaigned for registration of land and property ownership, and ethics in political life, and provided his expertise to various medical charities in York.

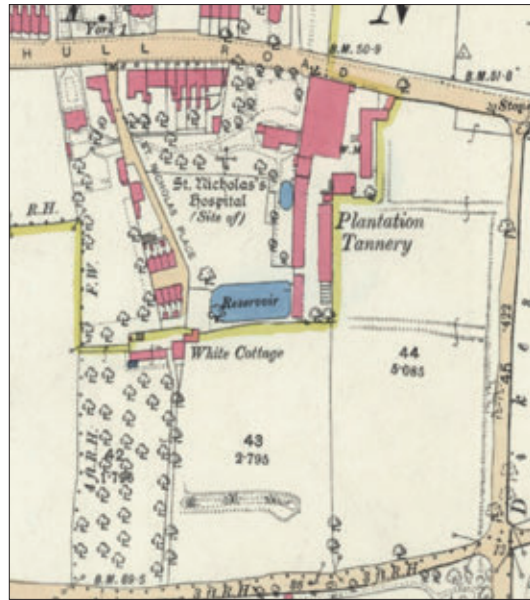


Figure 30: Joseph Backhouse’s Plantation House, Hull Road, York, map Yorkshire CLXXIV 11, published 1892. (courtesy of National Library of Scotland. Detail created by author)

5. *Craspedia glauca*. Glaucous Craspedia. A herbaceous plant belonging to *Compositae*, found in Van Diemen’s Land, whence it was sent by Mr. James Backhouse to his brother, in whose nursery at York it flowered in April last. It is probable that it will only require the protection of a cold frame in our winter.

The new species of *Glycine*, or *Wistaria*, from Moreton Bay, which I exhibited last year to the Horticultural Society, is now making an extraordinary sensation in the London trade. I have it in all sizes and shapes, and in all temperatures, from our hottest stove to the open air. I shall certainly have “bad luck,” if I do not flower it first. I have had many enquiries respecting it; and this general notice must suffice for all. It is an exceedingly easy plant to manage, and not difficult to propagate; but, being in such extraordinary demand, it must be a dear plant for two or three years to come. Its foliage is much stronger than that of *Wistaria sinensis*, and consequently less liable to injuries; yet it is fully as handsome. I never rightly heard the exact colour of its flowers. It was sent home under a very flattering character by a good English botanist, Mr. Backhouse, brother to the celebrated nurseryman of that name at York. Mr. Low procured the stock of seedlings, which were only two plants: I got one of them, which soon developed its characters, and grew away freely. Being thus necessarily more acquainted

Figures 28 and 29: Reports (above) of *Craspedia glauca* in *The Horticultural Register*, 5, 1836, (below) of *Wisteria* by D. Beaton in *The Gardener’s Magazine*, new ser 5, 1839. (courtesy of Biodiversity Heritage Library)

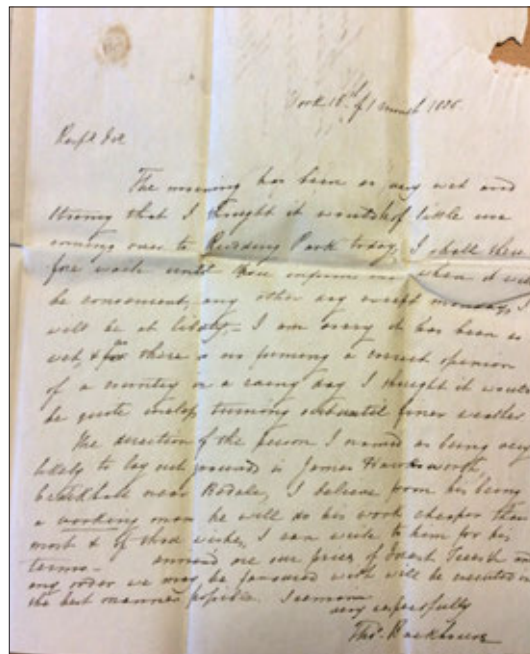


Figure 31: Thomas Backhouse writes in 1835 to Sir Joseph Radcliffe, Rudding Park (Radcliffe of Rudding Park archive, West Yorkshire Archive Service, WYL280/2/398)

### *Consolidation at Holgate*

It is not clear whether Thomas realised that bringing the railway to York would signal the end of centuries of horticultural activity on the Friars' Garden site. Some commentary implies that Backhouses profited from the sale of land for the railway but as above, they did not own the land: York Corporation owned the majority and the Hewley Trust the remainder. Purchasing the Riggs nursery as a going concern enabled Backhouses to transfer the customer-facing side of its business to Fishergate, still relatively close to the city centre. However, they were there for fewer than 20 years before consolidating all their activity at Holgate in 1853. It is generally held that Backhouses moved to the nursery site in Holgate, *ab initio*, in or around 1853; for example, Davis states that after Thomas's death James i and James ii 'jointly directed the growth of the nursery' and supervised its move 'to a 100 acre site at Holgate' York, in 1853'.<sup>81</sup> Re-assessing evidence from maps, newspaper reports and advertisements, and family history reveals this tells only part of the story and again underplays Thomas's role.

The first newspaper account of 'Messrs. Backhouse and Son, of Holdgate' (the older spelling of Holgate) at the York Horticultural Society show in August 1852, and a report of an accident caused by a falling wall in a building in Fishergate 'lately occupied by Messrs. Backhouse' in June 1854, between them, indicate the point at which the operations of the business ended at Fishergate. Backhouses themselves signalled the transfer with advertisements in December 1853.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, press reports and advertisements show Backhouses were using sites in Holgate long before 1853. In 1827, for example, copyhold land in Holgate, then in the possession of Mr Waud (the miller) was advertised as 'adjoining the Garden or Nursery of Messrs. Backhouse'. In May 1843, a pump was stolen from 'the nursery of Messrs. Backhouse at Holdgate, near this city', and in November 1849 the *Herald* reported fisticuffs between two labourers employed by 'Messrs. Backhouse, the florists at Acomb' and some passing labourers looking for work.<sup>83</sup> These facts, and others, show not only that Backhouses had taken on Telford land other than Friars' Gardens when they bought the nursery, but also that they ran that land as a nursery, with attendant gardeners, before the move from Fishergate. Thomas Backhouse's participation from 1838 in meetings of the Township of Holgate (which he chaired) and his role as one of the surveyors of 'the Highway' from 1839 to 1841 confirm a significant presence in the area at an earlier date.<sup>84</sup>

The Manor of Acomb (otherwise 'Acomb and Holgate') was exchanged by King James I in 1622 for York House or York Place in the parish of St Martin in the Fields in London, then the property of the Archbishop of York. A hundred and fifty years later, the then Archbishop assigned the Manor to Stephen Croft of York and Giles Alcock of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the eleven-year lease allowed.<sup>85</sup> The two largest tracts of land that made up the Backhouse nursery on the 1852 Ordnance Office map had been allotted to the Dean and Chapter at Enclosure in 1746 and were leased by the Telfords from at least 1795.<sup>86</sup>

Church records confirm that Backhouses gardened on the Telford holdings in Holgate, years before the final transfer of their business from Fishergate, possibly from the point when the business was sold to them.<sup>87</sup> In October 1845, Telfords finally transferred the lease with the Dean of York Minster for just over 32 acres of land in 'Holgate' to Backhouses.<sup>88</sup> As at Friars' Gardens, then, it seems that Telfords sub-let to Backhouses in the early years of their business. The rent for the church land was £10 (£12,800) twice yearly, to be paid 'at Haxby's tomb' in York Minster, on the Feast of the Annunciation and on the Feast of St Michael the Archangel, for the benefit of the vicar of St Mary Bishophill the Younger. One can only wonder what committed members of the Society of Friends thought of these conditions.

As well as the church land, as early as 1763 Telfords leased land from York Corporation at Holgate,



Figure 32: Backhouse Nursery, Holgate, mapped on Yorkshire Sheet 174. Surveyed 1846-51, pub 1853.

(courtesy of National Library of Scotland.  
Detail created by author)

including six acres ‘alongside the Beck at Holgate Bridge, south of Holgate House’.<sup>89</sup> This lease was renewed in 1783 and 1804, the latter to run until 1816 (the date at which Telfords sold the business to Backhouses). Hodgson, the Holgate local historian, also shows this land as rented by Backhouses from the Corporation along with two other, smaller, fields.<sup>90</sup> James i lived in Holgate House for many years and maps indicate nursery land marked to the south of this, also. In fact the 1852 Ordnance Office map, surveying Acomb and Holgate between 1849 and 1851, shows just how extensive the Backhouse nursery was at its publication, and confirms that there had been significant development of the site long before the publicised move from Fishergate in 1853 (Figure 32).

### **Backhouses’ Plants**

The final part of the paper examines what is known about the plants Backhouses were growing and showing during this first period of the nursery’s development, up to the consolidation on the site at Holgate, and what this indicates about both the nursery’s and Yorkshire’s place in the world of early nineteenth century horticulture

Few Backhouse catalogues for this early period have been found, but the one issued in the year that they took over the nursery is crucial for understanding what the brothers took on of Telfords’ stock-in-trade and how they then developed it. Individual plant listings are extensive in some cases – there are over four pages of roses, for example - but tiny in others. There are no pelargoniums, a single chrysanthemum (*grandiflorum*) and two dahlias (*superflua*, (now *pinnata*) and *frustranea* (now *coccinea*).

The next extant catalogue – for 1821 – shows development, with separate listings for aquatic plants and for ‘Camelias, Indian Chrysanthemums, and Pelargoniums or Geraniums requiring the protection of a Green-House’. Apple varieties had increased in number, while trees and shrubs, perennials, and annuals and biennials had decreased. There is no mention of obtaining plants from elsewhere (as had been the case in 1816) so the reductions may suggest a desire to sell only what their nursery had grown. Further, having a separate section for camellias and so on signals an eye to the market, as these plants grew in popularity.

Analysis of press reports of the plants that Backhouses were exhibiting at flower shows makes it possible to judge something of the nursery’s ability to



Figure 33: Elements of Backhouses’ Exotic Bouquet shown at 1827 York Horticultural Society Flower Show (see Table 1 for list and sources)

respond to and create horticultural fashion. They are first sighted in 1825 winning a prize with their ‘exotic bouquet’. In 1827, the plants in their bouquet had crossed the globe, from the Alps to the Mediterranean, from China to Africa, South America and Australia: Figure 33 and Table 1 show a selection of what was in it. A year later, the nursery won prizes also for greenhouse plants, hardy plants, and a hardy bouquet. The first prize dahlias were in 1829, alongside their first pelargonium prize, for the variety ‘De Vere’. The first ‘orchideous plants’, as they were called, appear in 1842. Between 1825 and 1854 almost 1,600 different plants were presented for the first time and won prizes.

It is possible now to speculate about what the show plants tell us about the nursery’s and Yorkshire’s contribution to horticultural history. First, plants were often shown soon after their first description in the botanical press, which means either that Backhouses were receiving specimens and growing them for the first time or that they were embedded in networks of nurserymen

who exchanged material between themselves. It seems that both are true. In the dahlia listings, for example, the plant names often refer to other nurseries or head gardeners, giving a picture of vigorous horticultural exchange, and an honest approach by Backhouses to naming that was not always the case elsewhere.

Secondly, from an early stage, Backhouses exhibited plants without necessarily competing at the York shows, more and more so as the century progressed. This may be because they started to compete at national shows, but there is a sense of holding back from local shows, perhaps reflecting an approach to marketing. Nurseries show new plants not just because they are proud of them but also because they want customers to

buy them. There are repeated patterns in the accounts of the flower shows where Backhouses show new plants and win prizes for them for a year or so, followed not long after by other York and Yorkshire amateur gardeners showing the same plants and winning prizes, while Backhouses have moved onto the next new plants.

Thirdly, the accounts of the flower shows allow something to be seen of Yorkshire's place in national horticulture, a topic that has not been adequately explored so far in garden history. Yorkshire had its first public flower show in 1821, which challenges the idea that the London Horticultural Society was first in the field in 1827. The first Yorkshire show had a small

*Table 1: Elements identified among those in Backhouse's prize-winning bouquet, 1827*

Name	Source	Reference	Date
<i>Anagallis fruticosa</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v.21-22, no. 831	1805
<i>Calceolaria rugosa</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 52, no. 2523	1825
<i>Camellia sasanqua</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 46, no. 2080	1819
<i>Chorizema ilicifolium (nana)</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 25-6, no. 1031	1807
<i>Correa speciosa</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 42, no. 1746	1815
<i>Crocea saligna</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 25-6, no. 989	1807
<i>Eucomis punctata</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 23-4, no. 913	1806
<i>Gnidia simplex</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 21-2, no. 812	1805
<i>Hypericum monogynum</i>	Botanical Magazine	v. 9-10, no. 333	1796
<i>Jasminum grandiflorum</i>	Edwards Botanical Register	v. 2, no. 91	1816
<i>Lechenaultea formosa</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 52, no. 2600	1825
<i>Lavandula pinnata</i>	Botanical Magazine	v. 11-12, no. 400	1797-8
<i>Linaria tristis</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 96, no. 5827	1870 (sic)
<i>Passiflora caerulea</i>	Botanical Register	v. 6, no. 488	1820
<i>Polygala mixta</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 41, no. 1714	1815
<i>Primula sinensis</i>	Curtis's Botanical Magazine	v. 52, no. 2564	1825

number of classes, but the 'select' company, a clergyman acting as chairman, and 150 gardeners and amateurs in attendance signal a significant event.<sup>91</sup> The show soon became a three-city event, rotating between Leeds, Wakefield and York, but in 1832 York broke away and established its own Society, with three to five shows a year.

Yorkshire clearly kept its eye on London. While grateful for the silver medal provided by the London Horticultural Society in 1828 to be at the annual disposal of the Yorkshire society, the chairman could not help himself, a year later, from suggesting that the Yorkshire show could 'scarcely be surpassed by even London itself'.<sup>92</sup> There was palpable *schadenfreude* the following year when the same chairman reported that the London Society was in financial 'ruin' but that no such fate was likely to befall the Yorkshire Society because it did not promise prizes 'until the money was in hand'.<sup>93</sup>

Fourthly, the accounts of the flower shows suggest a need to revisit what we understand about the history of floristry. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century Backhouses' gardeners were also accomplished florists in the modern sense, ie they arranged flowers. For example, in 1827, Henry Baines, who went on to be superintendent of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society gardens, was not only awarded first prize for Backhouses' hardy bouquet but the Society doubled the prize money because of 'the extraordinary beauty and arrangement of the flowers', of which there were 500 different sorts.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, despite the networks and friendly (one assumes) rivalry between nurseries, there was sometimes a worm in the bud. As at flower shows today, visitors were reported sometimes to have taken away 'some floral relic' of the show, which the Backhouse hardy bouquet 'abundantly supplied'.<sup>95</sup> At the May 1834 meeting, however, the Chairman reported that 'a circumstance of an unpleasant nature had occurred'. A slip of the 'very scarce and valuable plant, the *Manula Smithia*' (not identified, but possibly a *Manulea*<sup>96</sup>) from Backhouses' hardy bouquet, had been taken away. This theft happened before the show opened to the public, so the finger of blame pointed at a fellow gardener 'for the purpose of raising plants'.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that horticultural activity was embedded within York's walls from the middle ages and that there may have been more continuity of land use in relation to market and nursery gardening than is usually recognised. Three eighteenth and nineteenth century nurseries based in York fuelled much of the great tree plantation of the north, supported ornamental, fruit and vegetable planting in the large estates of Yorkshire, and trained and employed gardeners, as well as acting as an employment agency for them. The paper also shows that a nationally and internationally famous nursery actually developed on the foundations of two other successful nurseries in York, aided in large part by the horticultural and business competence of Thomas Backhouse, who has, to date, been overshadowed by his brother in public accounts of their nursery. Evidence from the Yorkshire flower shows has shown that the Backhouse nursery was at the forefront of plant introduction to new audiences in the early to mid-nineteenth century and was embedded in horticultural networks that supported this. Yorkshire was unarguably an important centre of horticultural production and market development, a fact that has so far been obscured by the dominance of London and the southern part of England in garden historical writing.

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## Notes

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- 2 For example Louise Crawley, 'The Growth of Provincial Nurseries: The Norwich Nurserymen, c.1750-1860', *Garden History*, 48 (2020), pp.119–34.
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- 6 Palmer, pp. 399–401.
- 7 Palmer, pp. 406–7.
- 8 'Monument Record MYO4168 - Dominican Friary (Blackfriars)', *York Historic Environment Record*, 2009 [www.her.york.gov.uk/Monument/MYO4168](http://www.her.york.gov.uk/Monument/MYO4168); Palmer pp. 406–7.
- 9 Palmer, p. 418.
- 10 Palmer, p. 417.
- 11 Palmer, p. 419.
- 12 All calculations of the modern value of a historic sum use the per capita GDP indicator. Calculated at [measuringworth.com](http://measuringworth.com).
- 13 Hugh Wilmott and Alan Bryson, 'Changing to Suit the Times: A Post-Dissolution History of Monk Bretton Priory, South Yorkshire', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2013), pp. 136–63. Willmott and Bryson spell his surname 'Blithman' but here the earlier spelling is retained.
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- 15 'York Title Deeds Relating to Blackfriars and the Friary (Conveyance to Lady Sarah Hewley)' 1699; North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZTP 1/14/2.
- 16 Richard Potts, *Dame Sarah's Legacy: A History of the Lady Hewley Trust* (The Lady Hewley Trust, 2005).
- 17 I am grateful to Prof Maryanne Horowitz at Occidental College, Los Angeles for pointing out that the map colorists would likely have had little contact with the map makers, so that coloration is no guide to use.
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- 19 Drake, *Eboracum* 1, p.274.
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- 28 Gail Falkingham, *Seed Catalogues and Invoices of Yorkshire Nurserymen and Suppliers*, North Yorkshire County Record Office, via: <https://nycroblog.com/2021/03/19/seed-catalogues/>.
- 29 For example John Telford: 'Correspondence from John Telford to Mr Popplewell', 1755, WY Archive Service, WYC 250/SC/7/2 to 4.
- 30 Potts, as Note 16, p. 90.
- 31 Without a Latin name it is difficult to identify this chestnut. The reference to striped leaves, probably variegation, perhaps suggests *Castanea* rather than *Aesculus*.
- 32 Geoff Hodgson, *A History of Holgate (in Five Parts)*. (York: Hodgson, 1999), pts 4, p.26.
- 33 The Manor of Wigginton was purchased from the Howard family of Escrick in 1670 by Christopher Hewley, a draper of York, who died only a few days later. Legal arguments in Chancery between Christopher Hewley's second wife, Anne and his daughter, Dorothy, ensued. Dorothy won the right to the inheritance and in 1692 she and her sister were in possession. Christopher Hewley's brother, Sir John Hewley, was Dorothy's guardian: the *Victoria County History* says that she put the estate in his hands. This Sir John Hewley was Lady Sarah Hewley's husband. The final settlement of the case between Dorothy and Anne Hewley describes the inheritance as the Manor of Wigginton with 3 messuages, 3 cottages, 100ac. land, 100ac. meadow, 100ac. pasture and 300ac. heath & furze in Wigginton, Pickering & Wistow.
- 34 *Whitehall Evening Post* (London), 10 December 1788: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection, via [gale.com](http://gale.com).
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- 36 'Yorkshire 1741 Poll Book', 1741, *The Genealogist*; 'Manor and Estate at Baildon and Bingley', 1794, East Yorkshire Archives, DDGS/15/109 and 111; 'Sir Matthew Wilson of Eshton Hall, Gargrave, Family and Estate Archive', 1774, WY Archive Service, 68D82/6/6/c/347.
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- 41 Marriage Record of Thomas Rigg i and Elizabeth Hopps. Source: [/search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2F007588536%2F00516&parentid=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2FBAN%2F44810%2F1](https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2F007588536%2F00516&parentid=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2FBAN%2F44810%2F1).
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- 43 Listing of Freemen of York, 1777. Source: <https://search.findmypast.co.uk/>.
- 44 Britain Country Apprentices. Indenture for Edward Brogdin. Source: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>.
- 45 Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, p. 131.
- 46 Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, p. 131.
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- 50 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 September 1828.
- 51 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 October 1829.
- 52 *Yorkshire Herald*, 5 June 1830.
- 53 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 26 August 1830.
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- 75 Sarah Backhouse, *Memoir*, p. 110.
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- 77 *Yorkshire Herald* 9 January 1830; *Yorkshire Herald* 8 February 1834.
- 78 ‘Grace’s Guide to British Industrial History’, [www.gracesguide.co.uk/York\\_Flint\\_Glass\\_Co/](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/York_Flint_Glass_Co/).
- 79 I am grateful to Andrew Parr of J and F J Baker, the last oak tanners in Britain, for explaining that once oak bark has been used in tanning pits and all the tannin has soaked out, it is lifted and piled, giving off considerable heat as it decomposes.
- 80 ‘Partnerships Dissolved’, *Perry’s Bankrupt Gazette*, 10 September 1831, IV edition, section 179, pp. 587–88. British Library Newspapers.
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- 83 *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 June 1827; *Yorkshire Herald*, 27 May 1843; 10 November 1849.
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- 87 Hodgson, *History of Holgate* vol. 4, 26.
- 88 ‘Indenture (Lease of Land) at Holgate for 21 Years’, 1845, York Minster Archives.
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- 92 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 August 1829.
- 93 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 10 June 1830.
- 94 *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 July 1827.
- 95 *Yorkshire Herald*, 29 September 1827.
- 96 I am grateful to John Grimshaw, Director of the Yorkshire Arboretum, for this possible identification.
- 97 *Yorkshire Herald*, 17 May 1834.

A number of captions of Figures above have been simplified for ease of reading. For completeness, these are:

Figure 15, Rigg Baptism:

[/search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2F007587990%2F00435&parentid=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2FBAP%2F1804057](http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2F007587990%2F00435&parentid=GBPRS%2FYORKSHIRE%2FBAP%2F1804057)

Figure 25 Acacia, accessed at: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/14347#page/237/mode/1up>

Figure 26 Brunonia, accessed at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/240248#page/22/mode/1up>,

Figure 27 Tree Fern, accessed at: [http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_000000057DBC](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_000000057DBC)

Figure 28 Craspedia, accessed at: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/265860#page/474/mode/1up>

Figure 29 Wisteria, accessed at: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/100824#page/431/mode/1up>